

## **THE ROLE OF FAMILY: A MULTI-CULTURAL IMPERATIVE?**

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Many of the therapeutic paradigms are based on assessing individual needs and promoting individual goals. However, to be culturally competent we should at least question the individualistic values that lie behind these practices or, better still, promote family system approaches such as Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT).

Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT) is perhaps one of the most, if not the most, culturally competent approaches because it was founded upon this principle. BSFT is a SAMSHA-recognized, evidence-based practice that was developed in Miami, Florida to respond to the needs of the Cuban immigrant population in the 1970s. It was found that these families valued family connectedness over individual autonomy, and tended to focus more on the present than the past. As a result, BSFT helps to restructure the family to further family connectedness, and focuses on the family's presenting concerns. In addition, this model incorporates research-based strategies for engaging reluctant family members into treatment, joining with family members, increasing retention, and diagnosing and assessing family interactions.

BSFT can help families address stressors such as migration stress, discrimination and social inequalities, separation of families who move across national boundaries, and acculturation stress, among others. It can empower families in their interaction with the larger social systems, and to work on underlying family vulnerabilities to these stressors. Perhaps, not surprisingly, research is now supporting its effectiveness with African American families, and anecdotally with other cultures, including the deaf community. Locally, this highly effective approach is one of the evidence-based practices utilized by 5 Acres in Pasadena.

Clinicians initially appear to find working with families challenging. Perhaps they are reacting to a feeling of being out-numbered by the members of the family, fear of chaos in the sessions, or limited preparation in graduate programs. Nonetheless, we should consider expanding the use of Brief Strategic Family Therapy, among other family friendly approaches, in Los Angeles County.

For further information on Brief Strategic Family Therapy, see Szapocznik, J, Schwartz, S, Muir J.A, & Hendricks Brown, C. (2012). Brief Strategic Family Therapy: An intervention to reduced adolescent risk behavior, Couple and family Psychology: Research and Practice, 1 (1), 134-145.